nomical, political, or social nature and not a military problem in origin," and that "the application of purely military measures may not, by itself restore peace and orderly government because the fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social." Finally, the *Manual* contains this guidance regarding the overall strategic intent of military actions in small wars: "The motive in small wars is not material destruction. It is usually a project dealing with social, economic and political development of the people."

The real value of the *Small Wars Manual*, however, lies in its detailed discussion on planning and conducting a campaign at the operational and tactical levels of wars. At the operational level, the *Manual* contains advice on how to develop a campaign plan to obtain national objectives and general guidance on how to avoid potential pitfalls. The *Manual* advises those planning a campaign for a small war to remember that "it is not at war with a neighboring state; it proposes no aggression of territory; its purpose is friendly and it wishes to accomplish its objectives with as little military display as possible with a view of gaining the lasting friendship of the inhabitants of the country."

The *Manual* doesn't stop there. It contains detailed information on theater design and organization. It provides "A Form for a Study of the Theater of Operations," which the planner can use to outline the political, economic, geographic, and military elements of power and their effects on the campaign. The *Manual* includes advice to the commander on what he should expect from each staff section and recommendations to each staff officer on how to better perform his duties.

On the tactical level, the *Manual* addresses virtually every tactical evolution faced by the U.N. peacekeeping forces in Somalia. U.N. forces will be providing security for the relief agencies' convoys; the *Manual* tells not only how to organize and defend a convoy, but also discusses the disposition of the escort in the convoy and the actions to be taken at a halt. Should the U.N. forces be called upon to supervise elections, the *Manual* can guide them from establishing a national board of elections, to registering voters, to supervising the actual voting. And, should the situation turn more violent, the *Manual* contains an abundance of information on patrolling, small unit tactics, and ambushes.

The shift in the world scene from a bipolar world where two Goliaths confronted each other over the traditional invasion routes of Europe, to a coalition of nations trying to maintain peace in an unstable world, has many military experts searching for new doctrine to complement their new "nontraditional missions." For Marines, who were known as America's nontraditional military force before they became the nation's amphibious force in World War II, the shift is like coming home. The Corps has a long tradition of small wars campaigning from the shores of Tripoli to the beaches of Grenada. The Corps earned its reputation as America's State Department troops by conducting nontraditional missions 180 times in 37 countries from 1800 to 1934. The lessons they learned from these campaigns were developed into doctrine, which they then published in what they named the "*Small Wars Manual.*" The *Manual* chronicled the lessons they learned in the early part of this century so that their successors would not have to repeat their mistakes. While the *Manual*'s language may be dated, its substance is not. Although no doctrinal publication can cover all possible contingencies in the operational continuum, the *Small Wars Manual* certainly provides today's commanders, staff officers, and noncommissioned officers a basis for the doctrine to execute the nontraditional military roles of the future. USMC

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Small War Lessons Learned

by Maj R. Scott Moore

The Marine Corps has had a long history of involvement in low intensity conflicts. Today's Corps can draw many lessons by studying its involvement in the "Banana Wars" of the early 20th century.

Recent international events have forced the American military to undergo a controversial reevaluation of its future. Military planners are reexamining their missions in light of the end of the Cold War and in light of outcries from Congress and the public for reduced defense spending. Both the Army and the Marine Corps have staked a claim to low-intensity conflict, an ill-defined level of war that encompasses a broad spectrum of operations ranging from peacekeeping to sustained counterinsurgency. Both profess to be expeditionary and, therefore, the weapon of choice for a nation faced with largely unknown future threats.

For Marines, the question is far more basic. Essentially, it can be summarized as follows: Given a requirement to provide expeditionary forces for low-intensity conflict, how should Marines prepare for small wars? For the foreseeable future, conflicts will most likely be fought in a cloudy politico-military environment often devoid of concrete guidance. Closing with and destroying an elusive enemy will be curtailed by equally pressing demands to limit casualties and collateral damage. Operation JUST CAUSE and its follow-on, PROMOTE LIBERTY in Panama, offer excellent examples, as does the current operation in Somalia. Marines in these operations quickly discovered that traditional training and organization did not adequately prepare them for situations in which they were required to neutralize an enemy one day, and then, a few days later, help many of these same people

reestablish order. While some have suggested that these are unique situations, an assessment true in any military situation, they nevertheless contain many of the elements that will confront Marines in the future—elements that Marines must come to grips with today.

Fortunately, Marines can draw on a reservoir of past experience to assist them in preparing for future small wars. For nearly 30 years during the early part of this century, Marines learned the hard truths of intervention. From 1915 to 1934, Marines in Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua built, often painfully, a doctrine for coping with intervention and its aftermath. While each produced challenges unique to the specific country and political situation, the three interventions nonetheless exhibited many similar characteristics. These so-called "Banana Wars" produced lessons that were later set down in a concise manual, titled, appropriately, the *Small Wars Manual*. More than 50 years later, many of these lessons remain relevant. As Marines prepare for future conflicts, they would do well to remember those lessons from the past.

Marines arrive at Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, during the early stages of U.S. involvement in the Caribbean.

Marines first came ashore in Haiti during the summer of 1915 to protect American lives and property and to restore political order in a country beset by civil war, banditry, and corruption. Crushing initial opposition, the Marines found themselves as masters of Haiti with all the inherent political and civil responsibilities that go along with that title. They immediately set about rebuilding a constabulary, essential to restoring and maintaining law and order. Known, at first, as the *Gendarmerie* and later as the *Garde d'Haiti*, the constabulary's charter included a provision for Marines to serve as officers in order to ensure a professionally run force. Under a special law, Congress allowed Marine officers and noncommissioned officers to be commissioned in the *Gendarmerie* while retaining their Marine rank and pay—a law that, at least initially, tended to attract top quality volunteers. The *Gendarmerie* was backed by a Marine brigade that initially accompanied the Haitians on patrol, then, as the constabulary improved, remained in the background as a reaction force. The dual system of a Marine-commanded *Gendarmerie* with a Marine brigade backing it up quickly crushed any lingering opposition in the Haitian countryside.

The Marines soon turned to a number of tasks for which they were largely untrained. *Gendarmerie* officers became de facto town mayors, judges, public works officers, marriage counselors, and any number of other positions associated with maintaining tranquillity in their districts. The brigade assumed responsibility for road building and other civil affairs projects, as well as for establishing training facilities for Haitian recruits and an academy for officer candidates to slowly replace *Gendarmerie* officers. To a large extent they performed these tasks with little political guidance or supervision, even though the Haitian intervention had been entrusted to the Navy by the President and State Department. The Marines were expected to possess a level of political savvy not usually required of professional soldiers.

While the progress achieved by the Marines was impressive, problems emerged. World War I reduced both the numbers and quality of Marines sent to Haiti. Barely trained Marine recruits and too many officers deemed unfit for duty in France replaced the select Marines of earlier days. With this reduction in quality came excesses—as much from ignorance of Haitian culture as from intent—although the number of complaints from Haitians concerning alleged Marine crimes also increased. Slowly, nationalistic opposition to the Marine presence grew, both from Haitian politicians who resented their loss of power to the Americans, and from peasants in the interior who—right or wrong—bridled at Marine behavior. The greatest challenge came from a charismatic giant named Charlemagne Peralte, who rallied hundreds in the hinterland through a combination of voodoo religion and nationalism. Although Charlemagne was ultimately hunted down and killed—an event that featured the public display of his body strapped to a board—the uprising drew some hostile public attention in the United States and a congressional investigation into the Marines' activities.

Concurrent with operations in Haiti, another Marine brigade landed in Santo Domingo in 1916 with a similar mission. Centered around the 4th Marines, this brigade quickly settled a civil war, restored order, and set about building an apolitical constabulary, replete with Marine officers, to protect a newly installed democracy (again directed by a U.S. Navy admiral). The 4th Marines reverted to reserve status, as the Haitian brigade had. Occasionally, these Marines would hunt down bandits and back the *Guardia Nacional de Dominicana* when necesary. Soon the Marine brigade began losing their best officers and men to the war in France, which greatly reduced the brigade's effectiveness, and it began to suffer many of the same problems as those occurring in Haiti. Fortunately, no natural leaders like Charlemagne

emerged to unite an opposition movement, although banditry in the countryside increased. Dominican politicians, however, chaffed at Marine rule, despite often profiting from many of the Marines' civil affairs projects. By 1924 the Marines in Santo Domingo, faced with little in the way of a threat and buffeted by an unsupportive American public, were forced to withdraw back to the United States, having hastily turned the *Guardia* over to the Dominicans.

In both of these instances, military duties revolved around continuous small unit patrols and seemingly endless civil affairs projects. The patrols tracked bandits and maintained stability, only occasionally resulting in combat, which was usually swift, violent, and inconsequential. Living among the populace required a high degree of discipline; the slightest transgressions aggravated an already touchy situation. The difference between the highly disciplined Marines who served before, and after, World War I, and those short-term Marines and largely rejected officers who served in Hispaniola during the war can be readily seen by the increase in bloodshed and unrest from 1917 to 1919. The Marines faced a situation that demanded skills and perseverance for which they were often untrained—a situation that required the best the Marine Corps had to offer. Overall, their record was rather mixed.

In 1927, the Marines had another opportunity when they landed to restore order and establish a government based on American ideals in Nicaragua. Initially, the intervention proceeded much like those in Haiti and Santo Domingo. A Marine brigade remained ashore to maintain order, while a constabulary—the *Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua*—was established with Marine officers and native troops. With armed opposition dispersed, Marine duties concentrated on continuous patrolling, training of the *Guardia*, and civil affairs. Unlike in Haiti and Santo Domingo, however, the Marines soon confronted a more tenacious enemy—a nationalist by the name of Augusto Sandino who had refused to surrender. Soon after the Marines arrived, Sandino moved into the mountains of northern Nicaragua and established a guerrilla army supported by the population of the region.

Extensive patrolling and establishment of Marine and *Guardia* posts in most of the major towns attempted to corner and destroy the rebel bands led by Sandino. Many civil affairs functions—so prevalent in earlier interventions—succumbed to the requirements of combat. Technology assumed greater importance with the introduction of Marine fighters and transports, as well as an ill-fated prototype helicopter. Nothing, however, could replace the infantrymen. Wearied by constant patrolling in the primitive countryside, ambushes, and the inherent frustrations of counterinsurgency warfare, some Marines became callous, treating local villagers as the enemy. Although incidents of mistreatment were few, they inevitably became magnified by a generally hostile native press and growing American impatience with the intervention. By 1932, despite heroic Marine efforts, the American public had had enough. Under political pressure from Congress, the Marines withdrew, having pursued Sandino into the remote areas of northern Nicaragua where a stalemate ensued.

After nearly 20 years, the Marines left Latin America having learned, often through bitter experience, the operational and political lessons of small wars. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson learned reiterated the necessity for light infantry tactics in a counterinsurgency environment. Marine and constabulary units relied on small foot patrols, sometimes augmented by pack animals, to locate and harry guerrillas and bandits. Mobility did not rest on technological advantage, nor did it rely on extensive logistics support. The most effective tactics adopted the ways of their adversaries—moving along trails on foot in small patrols, relying on training, aggressiveness, and the lightweight firepower of the Thompson submachine gun and the Browning automatic rifle to overcome opposition. "Chesty" Puller's feared Company M in Nicaragua even discarded pack horses as being too cumbersome and slow. His company, operating in small patrols of 20 to 40 men, disappeared into the countryside for several days, usually doggedly on the trail of a Sandinista band. The Marines, moving on foot and living off the land, employed classic light infantry tactics to best their opponents.

These small units depended as much on their composition as on their mobility. Mixed patrols of Marines and native troops proved more effective than units made up strictly of one or the other. Well-trained constabulary troops, buttressed by their Marine officers and noncommissioned officers, and perhaps a few automatic riflemen, meshed knowledge of the terrain and people with the skills of professional soldiers. When well led, the constabulary proved a formidable match for their opponents. Quite often, their understanding of the populace and local conditions saved Marines from disaster, and in many cases, constabulary troops developed fierce loyalties to their Marine officers, even to the point of sacrificing their lives for them. This integration of Marine and constabulary forces not only harnessed the best qualities of both, but it shifted the emphasis of patrolling and fighting to local forces, making it a national, rather than American, endeavor. These mixed units proved extremely effective at combating guerrillas while downplaying the role of the Marines.

A Marine patrol, led by a native guide, heads into bandit country in Haiti, c. 1915–16.

The Marines pictured above were involved in the successful defense of the Ocotal garrison in Nicaragua in July, 1927. As Millet relates in **Semper Fidelis,** *the successful defense of the Ocotal garrison "had so punished the* **Sandinistas** *that the Marines announced the destruction of the last armed challenge to the occupation."*

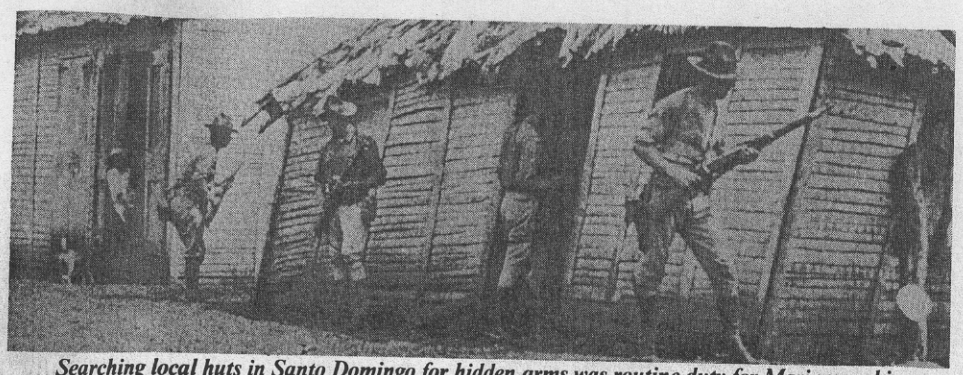
The Marine commanders in Latin America quickly discovered that closely controlled, large-unit sweeps proved impractical. Rather than trying to sledgehammer guerrillas, Marines turned to continuous, decentralized, small unit actions to chase and isolate insurgents. A general campaign plan sufficed to bind operations into a cohesive whole. In Nicaragua, the Marines sought to keep Sandino off balance and wear him down. Puller's wide-ranging company and Merritt A. Edson's famous Coco River patrol, although apparently uncoordinated, were but a part of this larger, overreaching campaign to eliminate the insurgents. While he rarely engaged in open battle, Sandino found himself forced into the remote "El Chipote" region of Nicaragua, where he was unable to influence much of the Nicaraguan population. In Haiti and Santo Domingo, the numerous patrols saturating the countryside destroyed any attempts at guerrilla warfare. Charlemagne was eventually surrounded and destroyed, never able to influence the key areas of Haiti. Bound by an overall mission and plan, these decentralized operations, conducted by small groups of Marines and constabulary, kept insurgents on the run, if not eliminating them, at least isolating them from the population.

The driving force behind all of these operations, as in any war, proved to be intelligence, especially that derived from human sources. While the Marines experimented with aerial reconnaissance, which proved effective in identifying large guerrilla bands and likely encampments, most tactical intelligence evolved from piecing together reports from small unit patrols or interviews with the local populace. Conversely, the Marines quickly discovered that their moves could not remain hidden from their enemies for long; the population served as the enemy's eyes and ears. For the Marines, their survival, as well as their ability to find elusive guerrillas, often depended on the goodwill of the populace. Attempts at intimidation, although they occasionally produced some immediate tactical information, often prevented Marines from gaining intelligence. Sandino's army itself proved particularly adept at exploiting Marine mistakes and consequently developed an extensive intelligence network that reached into Managua. Marines who failed to cultivate the intelligence gathering capabilities of the populace did so at their own peril.

But probably the most important lesson learned by Marines in Central America centered on the civil and political dimensions of intervention, which many years later would come to be called "winning the hearts and minds" of the country. Actually, it was much more than that. Marines assigned to constabulary units assumed more than command positions. In most cases, they became district chieftans dispensing law, settling local squabbles, directing civil construction projects, and even deciding on food distribution. Maj Julian C. Smith, later to command the 2d Marine Division at Tarawa, found himself in charge of the Jinotega district of Nicaragua, with guidance to campaign against Sandino and "demonstrate the advantages of law and order" to the population. To do so, he possessed almost dictatorial powers over both his men and the population. His duties typified those of countless other Marine officers serving in Latin America at that time.

Recognizing the special qualifications required of Marines to perform these varied tasks, the Corps attempted to carefully screen those assigned, unfortunately not always successfully. The *Small Wars Manual* later set forth the standards, calling for physically fit Marines who possessed a language capability, understood the culture of the country, and were "educationally and professionally equipped." A Nicaraguan *Guardia* officer was more succinct, stating that the successful Marine had to be fearless, possess common sense and a knowledge of human nature, have "an enduring patience and good humor," and speak fluent Spanish. Regrettably not all possessed these qualities, particularly during the years of World War I. In Haiti, insensitivity, arrogance, and racism too often alienated the local peasants. Smedley Butler incurred the wrath of many with his overzealous conscription of labor for road building. In Santo Domingo, arrests of locals by Marines left sour feelings. The provost marshals, usually young officers who the Marine brigade did not need, struggled through with little understanding of Dominican laws or customs. Perhaps most telling, nine Marines were killed by their own Nicaraguan troops when the officers' overbearing arrogance and cultural disregard infuriated the men. Such lapses invariably resulted in political exploitation by opposition groups, partially negating many Marine accomplishments.

While the Marines mastered both military and civil tasks, they also confronted the harsh political realities of small wars. Even possessed of the best intentions, American intrusion into the internal politics of another state eventually alienated the people it was intended to help. When Marines withdrew from Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua, few of the populace mourned their departure. Throughout their tenure, the Marines had been exasperated by the apparent indifference of the people to attempted political and social reforms. Despite the many civil improvements, the Marines never



Searching local huts in Santo Domingo for hidden arms was routine duty for Marines seeking to restore order and neutralize an elusive enemy.

seemed quite capable of allaying underlying resentment of the American presence. The Marines realized too late that trying to superimpose American social and political standards on top of a developing country's own political and cultural institutions merely aggravated nationalism. As Marines embarked aboard Navy ships in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1934, a Haitian commented, "We know you have helped us in may ways, and we appreciate that. But, after all, this is our country, and we would rather run it ourselves." Samuel Griffith, a Nicaraguan veteran, accurately assessed the Marines' inability to destroy Sandino when he stated years later that, above all, Sandino was a patriot and a nationalist.

Sensing this underlying political tension, Marine commanders rightfully sought to restrict the scope of military operations in Latin America and limit damage. Strict rules of engagement curtailed the possibility of Marines killing or wounding civilians. In Nicaragua, aircraft were severely limited in their target selection and were often forbidden from attacking guerrillas if a village might be damaged. In Santo Domingo, the Marine brigade commander instituted a comprehensive training package to indoctrinate his men on the sensitivity of their duties. This followed a concerted effort to eliminate the substandard Marines still remaining after World War I. To their credit, the Marines in Latin America fully understood the ramifications of a lack of discipline and random destruction, and took serious measures to limit both. Crimes committed against the local populace, to include public drunkenness, usually resulted in harsh punishment. Later, the *Small Wars Manual* devoted many pages to this critical aspect of intervention.

Contrary to many of the perceptions expressed by sometimes bitter Marines who returned to the United States without clear-cut victories, the source of much Marine frustration did not lie with political meddling into their operations, as many complained was the case (a complaint similarly voiced by other Marines 40 years later). In actuality, American politicians had little influence over Marine operations; indeed, in Haiti and Santo Domingo, Navy and Marine officers were appointed as political rulers. Even in Nicaragua, where the State Department attempted to exert more control, the Marine brigade commander received little outside guidance. This, however, was at the heart of the problem. Beyond the initial intervention, American political leadership lacked any sense of direction or goals. Consequently, coordinating political and military objectives was impossible. And the Marines, naturally, resorted to those duties they knew best, regardless of their practicality. That they were also able to achieve significant civil reform attests to their resourcefulness and drive. But never being able to mesh their actions into an overall plan, their gains proved transitory.

The lack of political vision had other ramifications as well—and it was the most bitter lesson for the Marines. The American public grew increasingly uncomfortable supporting military operations that provided little in the way of tangible rewards. To many, the Marines became the villains, and their failed policies were symbolic of their evilness. This was evident in the 1920s in the public's outrage over alleged Marine atrocities in Haiti and similar allegations in Nicaragua. Both incidents brought about congressional investigations that tarnished the Marine image. When, in 1929, eight Marines were killed in a Sandino ambush, American frustrations exploded. The press openly questioned Marine competence. In 1931, Marines in Haiti and Nicaragua received orders from the President, wearied by political pressure and confronted by the Depression, to turn over operations to the constabulary and depart. The Marines, stung by accusations in the press and from political leaders, returned to a less than grateful nation. They were experiencing the political turmoil of low-intensity conflict.

Twenty years of small wars taught the Marines well. Many of the commanders who later earned fame in the Pacific received their combat baptism in Latin America. Marine reliance on junior leaders and small unit tactics, so graphically exhibited at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, originated in the small unit infantry operations that predominated in the Banana Wars. Decades later, the highly successful Combined Action Program in Vietnam reflected the constabulary and civil affairs experiences of the senior officers who had served during their formative years with the veterans of Latin America. Indeed, much of the expeditionary heritage of the Marine Corps was cemented in Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua.

As Marines confront future challenges, such as those in Somalia, the experiences of their forebears who pioneered counterinsurgency, humanitarian relief, and nationbuilding operations offer guidance. While the specific techniques and details may be dated, the fundamental concepts remain valid. Discipline, flexibility, political-military interaction, small unit initiative, leadership, and a certain amount of boldness stood the Marines well in the jungles of Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua. But perhaps most important, they learned that military operations, however well intentioned and conducted, rarely solve underlying political problems. Today, the lesson remains a frustrating truth, still not fully comprehended by military and political leaders. Yet, small wars will remain a part of the future; probably far more prevalent than the more glorious, if perhaps somewhat anachronistic, conventional campaigns of DESERT STORM. Faced with this uncertain but surely violent future, Marines would do well to dust off an earlier generation's small wars lessons learned. USMC

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